

An Epic Quest to Visit all 8 Channel Islands

by Doug Grant



My 8 Island Adventure

I grew up in Carpinteria and would often gaze out at the Channel Islands, wondering what was out there and what they were really like. My father, Campbell Grant was an archaeologist, artist and historian and had been to Santa Cruz Island many times gathering facts for his many books on Indian art and culture. He told me many stories about the islands, including flying to Santa Cruz with the then owner of the island, Carey Stanton. I never got to go with him, but reveled at the notion of



Coches Prietos, Santa Cruz Island

seeing first hand what was out there. In 1974, my cousin, Oliver Andrews, first son of “Floppy” Hyde, introduced me to SCUBA diving. My first check out dive was at Anacapa Island. Alas, I found out what was “out there.” I was smitten with the beauty both above and below the water. Since then and to this day, I have been an avid SCUBA diver. Over the next 30 years, I was able to visit and dive on most of the Channel Islands. I even got to spend a week on San Nicholas with Channel Islands Restoration reestablishing indigenous plants.

One day, someone asked if I had been to all 8 of the Channel islands. Three of the most distant were still a mystery to me. I put visiting all 8 on my “bucket list”. The following is the story of how I completed that goal 45 years after setting foot on Anacapa.

I have a 22 Ft. Bayliner Classic Cruiser power boat. Her name is “*Indian Summer*.” She is very seaworthy and could probably take a 6’ breaking wave over the bow. She cruises at 20 – 26 Kts. Sleeps 4 and is comfortable to stay in for extended island trips. I have owned her for about 10 years and have traversed the channel a dozen times on SCUBA diving trips.

One day, my artist friend and fellow Carpinterian, Thomas Van Stein asked if I thought it was possible to find the Cabrillo monument on San Miguel Island. That started my quest for all 8. I studied the charts, calculated fuel consumption and capacity of the *Indian Summer*. San Miguel was within reach. On July 6th of this year, Thomas and I launched from Santa Barbara Harbor with a bead on San Miguel. On the way, we were greeted by a Grey Whale that put on a show for us displaying it’s tail fin in dramatic fashion as it sounded to the deep. A large pod of dolphins crashed the party too. After about 2 ½ hours we dropped anchor in Cuyler Harbor. I launched the inflatable and Thomas and I went ashore in search of the Cabrillo Monument.



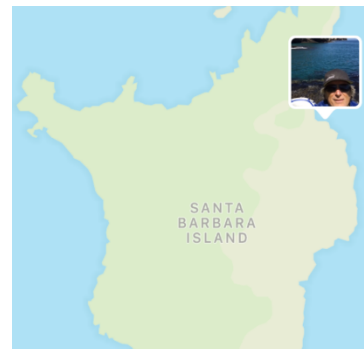
It was a ½ mile hike up to the top of a bluff overlooking the spectacular sand dunes of Cuyler Harbor.



As we returned to the boat, from a respectable distance, we passed Elephant seals basking on the beach. Thomas fixed us dinner and I poured us both a glass of wine to celebrate. The following day we set sail for Santa Barbara Harbor. Six down, two to go!

Now starts the Epic push to visit all 8! On Friday, August 2nd I launched the *Indian Summer* from Ventura Harbor. This time, I was making the trip solo. I took a very sober look at the daunting task of going a long way offshore with very little support or back up. The first thing I did was purchase an offshore harness with a self-inflating flotation device and a tether that I attached to the boat. My next investment was a PLB (personal locator beam) that is capable of sending out a distress signal to a satellite that alerts first responders. This device is only to be used in dire circumstances such as a sinking boat as the Coast Guard will likely send out a Huey Helicopter to get me. Fortunately, I never used it, and with a little luck, I probably never will.

Just prior to leaving Ventura, I checked the weather. The wind was light, but the morning fog was really thick. Visibility was less than a mile. My onboard GPS Chart Plotter indicated the course from Ventura Harbor to Santa Barbara Island hugs the coast for several miles and then crosses the "Shipping Lane" diagonally. This would leave me exposed in the commercial Shipping lane for a longer period of time under low visibility conditions. Not a good idea. The weather app on my tablet indicated that the fog was hugging the coast, but only to a couple of miles out where it cleared up. That was my plan. I headed straight out to sea, away from the coast until the visibility improved before plotting a new course to Santa Barbara Island. After 48 NM, I made it to the Island.



The first thing I noticed was a building high up on a bluff and some other structure closer to the water. There was no dock or easy means to disembark so I circumnavigated the island looking for a suitable landing. None existed. The island is surrounded by a rocky, craggy shoreline and cliffs. Eventually, I braved the sketchy landing at the structure, graciously asking permission from the resident harbor seals. They obliged and I made my way up to the visitor center where I signed my name in the ledger.



After snapping a few more photos from atop the bluff, I returned to the *Indian Summer* and set a course for Two Harbors on Catalina Island. I arrived there about 4:00 PM and proceeded to fuel up. It took 41 gallons. My main tank holds 55 gallons and I have a 15 gallon reserve tank. I felt relieved, my fuel calculations were accurate and that I had plenty in contingency.

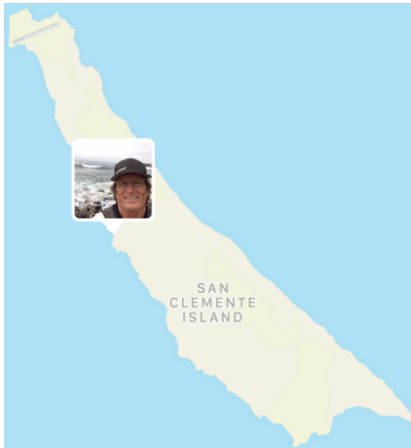
I paid for a mooring buoy and rowed the inflatable ashore.



There I met a couple from New Port Beach that invited me to join them for dinner. We have become friends. Boating people are good! After dinner, a bit exhausted from the trip, I rowed back to the *Indian Summer*. I started to take a shower, lathered up with my eco friendly biodegradable soap and the water ran out. No worries, I just dove overboard to rinse off. Happy that I had gotten island # 7 behind me, I went to bed.



The next morning, I woke up, hauled the inflatable aboard, headed around the corner of Catalina and set a course for San Clemente Island. I had looked up the Navy controlled island to determine what was my best chance of getting on the island without being arrested or shot. About 90% of the



coastline was listed as "restricted." There was a section, several miles long on the West side, mid island that was listed as "available, no scheduled operations." This didn't mean that it was open to the public, it meant that fisherman could approach the island within 3 miles without being fined or arrested. I figured this was my best chance. I approached the island from the North and when the 3 mile boundary showed up on my chart plotter, I turned starboard, skirting the island. After about 15 miles heading South I noticed that the airfield tower on the North end of the island was out of view. I figured this was my chance and turned port directly towards the island. When I got within 100 yards, I realized that the coast was rocky and forbidding.



I was hoping for a sandy beach with no waves where the *Indian Summer* could be beached while I put my toes in the sand and took a few selfies. No such luck. Realizing the dilemma of knowing that the Navy could show up at any minute and that I had traveled so far to accomplish my goal, I said screw the Navy, I'm going for it. I motored back to a safe distance offshore and dropped anchor, tossed the inflatable overboard and rowed like a man possessed towards the island.



When my bare feet hit the rocky shore, I smiled and had an interpersonal reflection. I did it, all 8!

There was no time for getting all emotional, I took a few photos and went back to the inflatable. I pushed it off between waves and rowed with the same fervor that got me there. Once on board the *Indian Summer*, I throttled up and bolted out to the 3 mile boundary. Once clear of the Navy's wrath, I plotted a course for Avalon on Catalina.



Similar to my arrival at Two Harbors, I got fuel, secured a mooring buoy and rowed ashore for food and a drink. I had Swordfish. The following morning, I pulled out of Avalon and headed back to Two Harbors where I had breakfast with my new friends that I had met there the day before.



After breakfast, I set a course for King Harbor at Redondo Beach on the mainland. There I refueled and headed up the coast, stopping off at Paradise Cove where I had lunch. Then I proceeded around the point admiring all the fabulous homes that line the beach and can only be seen from the ocean. Then, as the day grew late and the fog rolled in, I ended my epic adventure as I had started it. Ventura Harbor in the fog.

Doug Grant

Upon my return and telling Marla Daily of the Santa Cruz Island Foundation about my nautical adventure, I was invited to join the "All 8 Club." This is said to be the most exclusive recognized geographic club in the world, with membership in the low 200s—a tenth of the famous 7 Summits Club.

I was grateful for the invitation and honored to accept.

